



Case No: SUZ-W-19-01

Order No: 34339

Contact: Diane M. Hanian

Office: (208) 334-0338

diane.hanian@puc.idaho.gov

Suez Water Co. requests exemption from certain rules related to disconnection of service

BOISE (May 24, 2019) – State regulators are accepting written comments on a proposal to exempt Suez Water Idaho Inc. from certain customer service rules related to the disconnection of service.

The two [Utility Customer Relations Rules](#) (UCCR) from which Suez has requested an exemption require regulated utilities to attempt to make face-to-face customer contacts and accept payments of past-due bills immediately prior to service being disconnected by field personnel.

Suez said the [proposal](#), which requires the approval of the Idaho Public Utilities Commission, is based on increased concern for the safety of its employees and the public.

Suez also requests Commission approval to waive a \$15 Field Collection Trip Charge, as well as the processing fee incurred by customers who pay their bill through Western Union.

Instead, the proposal calls for Suez to pay the Western Union fee on behalf of customers, and for those fees to be deferred until the next general rate case, when they would be recovered through rates.

In requesting Commission approval, Suez said “any perceived adverse impacts” to customers attributed to the rules exemptions would be mitigated by additional customer notification of past-due bills and pending disconnection of service, improved payment options and a plan to install smart meters.

In [testimony](#) submitted with its petition, a Suez official said the company is “studying and testing” meters with remote capabilities that would make it possible to disconnect or connect service without dispatching field personnel.

The testimony said the US Department of Labor Occupational Safety and Health Administration [web site](#) warns of “notable risks” associated with employees who deal directly with the public. It also cites six “altercation incidents” involving Suez employees in Idaho in recent years, ranging from “intimidation, verbal threats, to more aggressive physical altercations.”

These include “threatening to release or allowing aggressive dogs to chase the employee, attempting to engage the employee in a fist fight, poking the employee’s chest, shoving the employee and threatening to brandish a firearm.”

The Commission is accepting written comments on the proposal through July 18, 2019.

Go [here](#) to submit a comment in this case. Please include the case number, SUZ-W-19-01. Comments can also be mailed to P.O. Box 83720, Boise, ID 83720-0074 or faxed to (208) 334-3762.

All documents filed in this case, including Suez’s [petition](#), can be accessed [here](#). Or go to the Commission’s web site, www.puc.idaho.gov. Click on “Open Cases” under the “Water” heading and scroll down to case number SUZ-W-19-01.

UCCR 311 (4) and (5), the rules from which Suez has requested the exemption, state:

4. Opportunity to Prevent Termination of Service. Immediately preceding termination of service, the employee designated to terminate service shall identify himself or herself to the customer or other responsible adult upon the premises and shall announce the purpose of the employee’s presence. This employee shall have in his or her possession the past due account record of the customer and shall request any available verification that the outstanding bills are satisfied or currently in dispute before this Commission. Upon presentation of evidence that outstanding bills are satisfied or currently in dispute before this Commission, service shall not be terminated. The employee shall be authorized to accept full payment, or, at the discretion of the utility, partial payment, and in such case shall not terminate service. Nothing in this rule prevents a utility from proceeding with termination of service if the customer or other responsible adult is not on the premises.

5. Notice of Procedure for Reconnecting Service. The utility employee designated to terminate service shall give to the customer or leave in a conspicuous location at the affected service address, a notice showing the time of and grounds for termination, steps to be taken to secure reconnection, and the telephone numbers of utility personnel or other authorized representatives who are available to authorize reconnection.